



Highlights from the 125th South Carolina General Assembly Legislative Effectiveness Scores

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Executive Summary

The Center for Effective Lawmaking (CEL) is pleased to announce the release of the State Legislative Effectiveness Scores (SLES) for the 125th South Carolina General Assembly legislative session (2023-2024). This report offers highlights from our initial analyses of these scores, including:

- We identify the top 10 most effective legislators in the majority party in both chambers, the top 10 most effective minority-party lawmakers in the House of Representatives, and the top 5 most effective minority-party lawmakers in the Senate. Many legislators continued their patterns of highly effective lawmaking from the previous legislative session.
- We identify those lawmakers with the longest streaks of being in our prestigious “Above Expectations” category.
- We find that, consistent with our published research findings, there is an overall lawmaking benefit from being in the majority party. Across the 2023–2024 legislative term, majority-party Republicans consistently outperformed minority-party Democrats in State Legislative Effectiveness Scores (SLES) and bill outcomes. These differences highlight the institutional advantages of majority-party association.
- Serving as a committee chair is related to greater lawmaking effectiveness. This phenomenon was especially evident during the 125th South Carolina General Assembly. Committee Chairs in the 2023-2024 legislative term far surpassed the national SLES average of committee chairs. In fact, nearly half the laws produced in the General Assembly were proposed by committee chairs, further demonstrating the enhanced lawmaking power of committee chairs in the 125th South Carolina General Assembly.
- In addition, our findings indicate that effective lawmakers in one legislative session are likely to remain effective lawmakers across sessions, as several legislators appear among the lists of most effective lawmakers in both the 2023-2024 and 2021-2022 legislative sessions.

Introduction and Methodology

The State Legislative Effectiveness Scores discussed here are based on the combination of fifteen metrics capturing the bills that each member of each state legislature sponsors, how far their bills move through the lawmaking process, and how substantial their policy proposals are. The scores are normalized to an average value of 1.0 in both the House of Representatives and the State Senate in each legislative session. While the scores capture how successful an individual member of the South Carolina House or Senate is at advancing her sponsored bills, compared to all members of her chamber (in a legislative term), it's important to be cognizant of the fact that the State Legislative Effectiveness Scores do not capture lawmaking activities that occur behind the scenes, such as legislators advocating for the passage of bills that they haven't sponsored. The scores also don't capture how effective individual members of the House or Senate are at blocking the advancement of other legislators' sponsored bills. To the extent that we are interested in identifying who is most successful at advancing their sponsored legislation through the different stages of the lawmaking process (and why), however, the State Legislative Effectiveness Scores provide us with an objective indicator of legislators' efforts. More on our [methodology](#) and [scores](#) can be found at our website.

For each member of the House of Representatives and State Senate, we also identify a Benchmark Score, based on the average lawmaking effectiveness of legislators who share that legislator's majority- or minority-party status, level of seniority, and chair position on a committee. Controlling for these considerations is important in order to describe legislators on a more level playing field. For example, in the 125th South Carolina House of Representatives, minority-party lawmakers had an average SLES of 0.59 compared to 1.72 for majority-party members, while committee chairs had an average SLES of 2.58. In the State Senate, those averages were 0.53 in the minority party, 1.28 in the majority party, and 1.98 among committee chairs.

We then label each lawmaker as "Above Expectations" for those outperforming their benchmark scores by 50% or more, "Below Expectations" for those below 50% of their benchmark, and "Meeting Expectations" for all other legislators.

Finally, within each party, we rank each member according to their SLES. This ranking is used to generate the lists of top performers highlighted in the tables below. Given the substantial lawmaking benefit that follows from being in the majority party, ranking the entire South Carolina General Assembly together would be inappropriate, but these comparisons within each party are quite informative.

Highly Effective Republican Lawmakers in the 125th South Carolina House of Representatives

The following table identifies the ten highest-scoring Republicans in the 2023-2024 South Carolina House of Representatives. Five of the top ten were committee chairs.

Top Ten List—House Republicans (2023-2024 Legislative Session)

| | <u>Name</u> | <u>SLES</u> | <u>Committee Chair</u> |
|-----|---|-------------|------------------------|
| 1. | Murrell Smith (District 67) | 8.30 | None |
| 2. | Weston Newton (District 120) | 6.06 | Chair |
| 3. | Bruce Bannister (District 24) | 5.39 | Chair |
| 4. | William Hixon (District 83) | 5.17 | Chair |
| 5. | John West (District 7) | 4.23 | None |
| 6. | William Sandifer (District 2) | 4.18 | Chair |
| 7. | Shannon Erickson (District 124) | 3.69 | Chair |
| 8. | Christopher Wooten (District 69) | 2.95 | None |
| 9. | Cally Forrest (District 39) | 2.78 | None |
| 10. | Marvin Smith (District 99) | 2.74 | None |

At the top of the list is Representative Murrell Smith from District 67 (Sumter County) with a score of 8.30. In the 2023-2024 legislative session, he introduced 24 bills, 22 of which received action in committee and action beyond committee, 20 passed the House, and 8 became law.

Rep. Smith joined the House in 2001 and has served as the Speaker of the South Carolina House since 2022. Rep. Smith holds a B.A. from Wofford College and a J.D. from the University of South Carolina Law School. Rep. Smith began his legal career as a public defender, eventually transitioning to private practice, and he is currently a partner at Smith Robinson. In addition to his work in the legislature, Rep. Smith has served on the S.C. Sentencing Reform Commission, the Commission on Indigent Defense, and is a Member of the South Carolina Military Base Task Force.

Five Republican Representatives on our current list were also among the top-10 highest scorers in the 2021-2022 legislative session: Rep. Murrell Smith (District 67), Rep. Bruce Bannister (District 24), Rep. William Hixon (District 83), Rep. John West (District 7), and Rep. William Sandifer (District 2).

Highly Effective Democratic Lawmakers in the 125th South Carolina House of Representatives

The following table identifies the top ten highest scorers in the 2023-2024 House of Representatives among minority-party Democrats.

Top Ten List—House Democrats (2023-2024 Legislative Session)

| | <u>Name</u> | <u>SLES</u> | <u>Seniority</u> |
|-----|---|-------------|------------------|
| 1. | Todd Rutherford (District 74) | 3.14 | 13 |
| 2. | Russell Ott (District 93) | 2.74 | 5 |
| 3. | Joseph Jefferson (District 102) | 1.66 | 10 |
| 4. | Beth Bernstein (District 78) | 1.63 | 6 |
| 5. | Gilda Cobb-Hunter (District 95) | 1.26 | 16 |
| 6. | John King (District 49) | 1.26 | 8 |
| 7. | Seth Rose (District 72) | 1.13 | 3 |
| 8. | Marvin Pendarvis (District 113) | 0.94 | 4 |
| 9. | Chandra Dillard (District 23) | 0.93 | 8 |
| 10. | Elizabeth Wetmore (District 115) | 0.79 | 3 |

Topping our list is Representative Todd Rutherford of District 74 (Richland County) with a State Legislative Effectiveness Score of 3.14. He introduced 88 bills in the 2023-2024 legislative session, 5 of which received action beyond committee and passed the House, and 1 became law.

Rep. Rutherford joined the House in 1999 and became the Minority Leader of the South Carolina House in 2013. Rep. Rutherford holds a B.A. from Howard University and a J.D. from the University of South Carolina School of Law. Rep. Rutherford has worked as an Assistant Solicitor and Special Prosecutor of Narcotic and Drug Cases at the Fifth Circuit Solicitors' Office. In 1998, he founded his own law practice, specializing in criminal defense and civil litigation. In the community, he is a member of the NAACP Special Contributions Fund's national board.

Five Democratic Representatives on our current list were also among the top-10 highest scoring House Democrats in the 2021-2022 legislative session: Rep. Todd Rutherford (District 74), Rep. Russell Ott (District 93), Rep. Beth Bernstein (District 78), Rep. John King (District 49), and Rep. Elizabeth Wetmore (District 115).

Highly Effective Republican Lawmakers in the 125th South Carolina State Senate

The following table identifies the ten highest-scoring Republicans in the 2023-2024 State Senate. Nine of the top ten were committee chairs.

Top Ten List—Senate Republicans (2023-2024 Legislative Session)

| | <u>Name</u> | <u>SLES</u> | <u>Committee Chair</u> |
|-----|---------------------------------------|-------------|------------------------|
| 1. | Katrina Shealy (District 23) | 5.02 | Chair |
| 2. | Thomas Davis (District 46) | 3.43 | Chair |
| 3. | George Campsen (District 43) | 2.54 | Chair |
| 4. | Greg Hembree (District 28) | 2.51 | Chair |
| 5. | Thomas Alexander (District 1) | 2.48 | Chair |
| 6. | Michael Johnson (District 16) | 1.98 | None |
| 7. | David Wes Climer (District 15) | 1.90 | Chair |
| 8. | Luke Rankin (District 33) | 1.74 | Chair |
| 9. | Ronnie Cromer (District 18) | 1.70 | Chair |
| 10. | Lawrence Grooms (District 37) | 1.59 | Chair |

Among Republicans in the Senate, Senator Katrina Shealy of District 23 (Lexington County) ranked first with a SLES score of 5.02. In the 2023-2024 session, she introduced 39 bills, 24 of which received action in committee, 23 received action beyond committee, 21 passed the Senate, and 14 became law.

Sen. Shealy served in the South Carolina Senate from 2012-2024. When first elected in 2012, Sen. Shealy was the only woman serving in the South Carolina Senate, and she became the first Republican woman to chair a standing committee in the Senate. Sen. Shealy works as an Insurance Consultant for Keenan Suggs. Sen. Shealy has been actively engaged in various philanthropic causes related to children’s welfare, juvenile justice, and family services. She served on the Board of Directors for the Lexington County Department of Social Services and on the Friends of Juvenile Justice Advisory Board. Additionally, she has played significant roles in the South Carolina Republican Party, including serving as Chairman of the Lexington County Republican Party, President of the West Metro Republican Women, and Vice Chairman for South Carolina’s 2nd Congressional District.

For further information about Senator Shealy and her approach to lawmaking, see our interview with the Senator as part of our “Conversations with Effective Lawmakers” series [here](#).

Eight legislators on the list were among the top 10 highest-scoring Republicans in the 2021-2022 legislative session: Sen. Katrina Shealy (District 23), Sen. Thomas Davis (District 46), Sen. George Campsen (District 43), Sen. Greg Hembree (District 28), Sen. Thomas Alexander (District 1), Sen. David Wes Climer (District 15), Sen. Luke Rankin (District 33), and Sen. Lawrence Grooms (District 37).

Highly Effective Democratic Lawmakers in the 125th South Carolina State Senate

The following table identifies the five highest-scoring Democrats in the 2023-2024 State Senate.

Top Five List—Senate Democrats (2023-2024 Legislative Session)

| | <u>Name</u> | <u>SLES</u> | <u>Seniority</u> |
|----|--------------------------------------|-------------|------------------|
| 1. | Bradley Hutto (District 40) | 2.72 | 14 |
| 2. | Gerald Malloy (District 29) | 1.31 | 11 |
| 3. | Michael Fanning (District 17) | 1.00 | 4 |
| 4. | Deon Tedder (District 42) | 0.64 | 1 |
| 5. | Mia McLeod (District 22) | 0.61 | 4 |

Senator Bradley “Brad” Hutto of District 40 (Allendale, Bamberg, Barnwell, Colleton, Hampton, and Orangeburg counties) had the highest SLES for Senate Democrats in the 2023-2024 legislative session with a score of 2.72. During the 2023-2024 legislative session, he introduced 33 bills, 14 of which received action beyond committee, 11 passed the Senate, and 6 became law.

Sen. Hutto assumed office in 1996 and was elected Senate Minority Leader in November 2020. He holds a B.A. from the Honors College at the University of South Carolina and a J.D. from Georgetown University Law Center. He currently works as a trial lawyer. Sen. Hutto has also served as the Chairman of the Orangeburg County Democratic Party. In the community, Sen. Hutto is heavily involved with the Boy Scouts of America and has served as an Executive Board member of the Indian Waters Council, a Vigil Honor member of the Muscogee Lodge, and Lodge Chief of the Order of the Arrow. For his work with the Scouts, he has been recognized as a Distinguished Eagle Scout, a Silver Beaver, and with the Order of the Arrow Founder’s Award.

Three legislators on the list were among the top 5 highest-scoring Democrats in the 2021-2022 legislative session: Sen. Bradley “Brad” Hutto (District 40), Sen. Gerald Malloy (District 29), and Sen. Michael Fanning (District 17).

Lawmakers with Long-Standing Patterns of “Above Expectations”

Those who significantly exceed their benchmark score, which is calculated based on their seniority and status as a majority-party member and/or committee chairperson, are identified as being in our “Above Expectations” category. The lists below identify the Representatives and Senators with the longest active streaks of exceeding expectations in consecutive sessions continuing through (and including) the 2023-2024 legislative session.

**State Representatives with Longest Streak of “Above Expectations”
(through the 2023-2024 Legislative Session)**

| | <u>Name</u> | <u>Streak</u> | <u>SLES (2023-2024)</u> | <u>Seniority</u> |
|----|-------------------------------|------------------------|-------------------------|-------------------------|
| 1. | William Sandifer (R-2) | 8 Legislative Sessions | 4.18 | 15 Legislative Sessions |
| 2. | Todd Rutherford (D-74) | 8 Legislative Sessions | 3.14 | 13 Legislative Sessions |
| 3. | Murrell Smith (R-67) | 7 Legislative Sessions | 8.30 | 12 Legislative Sessions |
| 4. | John King (D-49) | 7 Legislative Sessions | 1.26 | 8 Legislative Sessions |
| 5. | Thomas Pope (R-47) | 6 Legislative Sessions | 2.07 | 7 Legislative Sessions |
| 6. | William Hixon (R-83) | 5 Legislative Sessions | 5.17 | 7 Legislative Sessions |
| 7. | Russell Ott (D-93) | 5 Legislative Sessions | 2.74 | 5 Legislative Sessions |
| 8. | Beth Bernstein (D-78) | 5 Legislative Sessions | 1.63 | 6 Legislative Sessions |
| 9. | Jason Elliot (R-22) | 3 Legislative Sessions | 1.73 | 4 Legislative Sessions |

Representative William Sandifer (R) of District 2 (Oconee and Pickens counties) had the longest streak of "Above Expectations" with 8 legislative sessions and a SLES score of 4.18 in the 2023-2024 legislative session. During the 2023-2024 legislative session, Rep. Sandifer introduced 17 bills, 9 of which received action beyond committee and passed the House, and 7 became law. In addition, Rep. Sandifer has ranked among the top 10 highest-scoring Republican Representatives since 2009.

Rep. Sandifer was first elected to the House in 1994 and served until 2024. He served as the Assistant Majority Leader from 2002 to 2004. Rep. Sandifer holds a degree in Mortuary Science from the Cincinnati College of Mortuary Science, and he previously owned and operated Seneca Mortuary. Rep. Sandifer has served as President of the South Carolina Funeral Directors Association, as the Chairman of the Board of Directors at Oconee Memorial Hospital, and he was a member of the Fort Hill Natural Gas Authority. In addition, Rep. Sandifer is a retired Major in the South Carolina National Guard. Rep. Sandifer has been recognized for his leadership through various accolades, including being named National Republican Legislator of the Year in 2000.

**State Senators with Longest Streak of “Above Expectations”
(through the 2023-2024 Legislative Session)**

| | <u>Name</u> | <u>Streak</u> | <u>SLES (2023-2024)</u> | <u>Seniority</u> |
|----|------------------------------|------------------------|-------------------------|-------------------------|
| 1. | Katrina Shealy (R-23) | 6 Legislative Sessions | 5.02 | 6 Legislative Sessions |
| 2. | Thomas Young (R-24) | 6 Legislative Sessions | 1.44 | 6 Legislative Sessions |
| 3. | Bradley Hutto (D-40) | 5 Legislative Sessions | 2.72 | 14 Legislative Sessions |
| 4. | Gerald Malloy (D-29) | 3 Legislative Sessions | 1.31 | 11 Legislative Sessions |

Senator Katrina Shealy of District 23 (Lexington County) had the longest streak of "Above Expectations" with 6 legislative sessions and a SLES score of 5.02 in the 2023-2024 legislative session. Sen. Shealy (as noted above) was the highest-scoring Republican Senator in the South Carolina Senate during the 2023-2024 legislative session. In addition, Sen. Shealy has consistently ranked among the top 10 highest-scoring Republican Senators since 2013.

Other Findings

In terms of broader patterns, consistent with the power of committee chairs found in most states, a pattern of chair-led lawmaking is clearly on display in South Carolina. The SLES of committee chairs across the country, on the whole, averages about 1.5, consistent with them taking about a 50% greater lawmaking role than other legislators. In South Carolina, however, chairs are even more influential, averaging an SLES in 2023-24 of 2.6 in the House and 2.0 in the Senate (the highest average that chairs in the Senate have achieved since the start of our data in 1989).

These differences translate into clear committee-leadership-driven laws as a result. Specifically, the 13 lawmakers who served as chairs in the House and 14 in the Senate together combined for 110 laws from their sponsored bills in the 2023-2024 sessions. In contrast, the remaining 143 members of the General Assembly accounted for 132 laws, meaning that nearly half of all laws came from committee chairs. Whether this pattern is indicative of centralized lawmaking in which many legislators are left out of the lawmaking process or indicative of reliance on policy expertise cultivated in committees is worthy of further investigation.

Conclusion

The 125th South Carolina General Assembly legislative session demonstrated consistent patterns in legislative effectiveness, with experienced legislators, committee chairs, and majority-party members continuing to hold a distinct advantage in advancing their policy agendas. Across both chambers, many of the most effective lawmakers continued their high performance from previous

sessions, indicating a durable capacity for lawmaking among key figures. These findings underscore the importance of institutional positions and experiences in shaping legislative outcomes in South Carolina.